

Mr. Chair Brown, Vice-Chair Blasdel and committee members:

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony in lieu of the testimony I had hoped to make at the Senate Education Committee Hearing on SB 107 yesterday when testimony was truncated because of time limits.

As I indicated at the committee meeting, I am Marcia Holland and I am the school board trustee elected by the voters in the Hellgate Elementary School District to represent them on the MCPS school board, a Missoula resident who is a homeowner and taxpayer in the Hellgate elementary district, and a parent of a student who attended Hellgate Elementary and who is now a senior at Hellgate High School.

I am asking you to vote no on Senate Bill 107.

A brief description of the district I represent: imagine a donut that is Missoula County School District – my district, Hellgate Elementary, would be the donut hole in that district.

As that district's high school representative for the past six years, I have not been contacted by Dr. Reisig or members of his board as to any concerns the board has as to the deficiencies in the educational opportunities that the Missoula kids from my district experience in the three Missoula high schools. I attend their school board meetings when I can and review the minutes of their meetings when I can't. There has never been any mention of deficiencies in the delivery of high school education in the Missoula high schools that I am aware of.

Last spring Hellgate Elementary had a two-question survey on its website indicating that the district was thinking about expansion. I took the survey, but had significant concerns about its statistical validity. Rather than rely on the survey results, I wanted to hear firsthand what people in my district thought.

I talked to and heard from:

Parents and teachers of kids in the elementary school;
Voters in the district with no children in any school;

Voters in the MCPS district who will be impacted by the expansion;
Parents and teachers of students in the Missoula high schools, both from
my district and the rest of Missoula.

What I have heard is confusion and worry rather than support.

Confusion

Voters are confused as to why a K-8 district in the middle of Missoula would think it needs to build a fourth high school when Missoula already has the three smallest AA high schools in the state, along with two faith-based high schools.

Voters are confused as to the soundness of duplicating services within a five mile radius at the expense of the taxpayer without a clear reason.

Voters are confused why other independent districts like Lolo (a feeder schools to Missoula's high school that is actually a separate town) doesn't get to weigh in on the discussion about "local control."

Voters are confused about why the issue is described as involving "local control" when it is not. It pits one area of the Missoula community against other areas of Missoula with only one side getting to vote. One voter described the situation permitted by SB 107 as preventing one part of the same Missoula community, one that would have to take a big hit financially by the decision, from being heard. As another person said, preventing the rest of the Missoula community from participating in a decision described as having a "horrendous impact" on the current three high schools and on the taxpayers in Missoula, seems fundamentally unfair.

Worry

Hellgate Elementary school parents are **worried** what it would mean to my district, a district that already has the daunting responsibility of running the largest independent K-8 district in the state if it takes on a new and very different responsibility, one with a steep learning curve.

Hellgate elementary now has the responsibility to make sure curriculum is adequately delivered in each one of its fifty-plus classrooms, the responsibility to address pressing immediate and future growth needs, and the responsibility to assure parents that, despite its size, its students are not being lost, bullied and marginalized in the sprawling campus.

Parents in my district and teachers who teach in my district (but who wouldn't get to vote as they live in a different part of Missoula (now there's an irony)) **worry** about what happens to these pressing needs if the district shifts its priority to building another high school in Missoula. Last fall Hellgate Elementary discussed buying additional acreage to build a new kindergarten building since the elementary district had hit space capacity in five years instead of the projected ten years supported by the last bond. But now the conversation seems to have shifted to one about buying land to build a fourth Missoula high school within miles of the existing three.

High school parents and students from my district who now have the choice about which of the three AA Missoula high schools to attend are **worried** that this choice to attend some of the best public schools in the state would be taken away if a fourth Missoula high school is built, especially if the students are forced to attend the class A school.

High school parents hope to retain the choices they have now – to choose to attend Big Sky, Hellgate, Sentinel or Willard. MCPS considers the Missoula kids from my district to be MCPS's Missoula kids and would want continue to offer these Missoula kids these choices, esp. because of the popularity of the vo-ag program, the academies, the AP and dual credit offerings, the Indian Education for All support for Native American students, the special ed departments, and the variety of athletic opportunities now available at our three AA Missoula high schools.

How would it be communicated to us Missoula voters in my district if SB 107 passes, that when we are voting "yes" or "no" on expansion, it is not a simple question. **I do not envy the person tasked with the wording of the ballot.** How do you adequately inform me as a voter on the ballot about the profound and complicated financial ramifications of the

decision [which were described by the DA Davidson representative and the attorney specializing in school bond law]?

Additionally should voters like me be informed of the following possibility? What if Missoula families continue to choose to attend one of the three AA Missoula high schools because of their established excellent programming, after a fourth high school is built? This fourth Missoula high school, planned as a class A high school, then ends up as a Class B or C school, duplicating services that already are better provided just miles away.

But what is most important to me is to describe for you the synergy that exists between the two districts in Missoula right now, that is somehow being overlooked. Let me tell you about two people.

The first is the Hellgate Elementary student that I got to know from being the middle school chess club mom and track meet volunteer for three years while my son was in middle school at Hellgate Elementary. This young man had a learning disabilities that was challenging, but he was a great kid -- and pretty great chess player. When he got to Big Sky High School, the staff embraced him. They recognized just what a wonderful young man he was -- and were able to do so because they had the support mechanisms in place that a AA school has to do so.

He was on the JV football team his senior year and struggled because of his disabilities, but was relentlessly positive. So imagine a situation where his teammates and coach conspire with the opposing team (shout out to Glacier High School) to let this young man score a 50-yard running touchdown for Big Sky in the final game of his high school career with both teams cheering for him when he crossed that goal line -- his mom praised Big Sky for creating this special moment, especially pointing out that Big Sky had such a wonderful program for special needs kids. (<http://www.dailyinterlake.com/members/glacier-jv-helps-make-special-memory-for-autistic-player/article ee4403b6-23bb-11e2-aaab-0019bb2963f4.html>)

I also got to meet a remarkable science teacher at Hellgate Elementary, David Bixby, who had a passion and a vision - that introducing kids to Robotics is a powerful learning experience. His passion was contagious. As a robotics coach for his after-school program for several years, I got to experience firsthand just how amazing this program was. When the Hellgate Elementary district voters elected me to MCPS, one of the first things I did was to share this experience with our high school level. Dr. Apostle listened to why it was important to continue this program started at Hellgate Elementary (and our sister independent district Target Range). Dr. Apostle worked with Missoula community members who had already seen the value because of its success in the two elementary feeder school districts and he found the financial support for this amazing program as well the volunteers needed for such a program at a high school level and it is now as a district-wide high school initiative involving students from all our Missoula high schools.

Thank you for considering my written testimony.

Marcia Holland
2616 Wedgewood Ct.
Missoula, MT 59808